

Yaeji, Mega Bog, James Holden, SQÜRL, Water From Your Eyes, Comfort, Yo La Tengo,
Fran Lobo, McKinley Dixon, Robbie & Mona, Zulu, Lankum, Lucinda Chua, James Acaster

LOUD AND QUIET

ISSUE 158

A photograph of three women in a carousel setting. The woman on the left has long brown hair and is wearing a black jacket. The woman in the center has long dark hair and is wearing a black top. The woman on the right has short grey hair and is wearing a black off-the-shoulder top. They are all looking towards the camera. The background shows the ornate structure of a carousel with warm lights.

boygenius

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A FESTIVAL REPUBLIC PRESENTATION

boygenius

SUNDAY 20 AUGUST 2023
GUNNERSBURY PARK, LONDON

PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS



Ethel Cain

AND MORE TO BE ANNOUNCED

TUESDAY 22 AUGUST 2023
THE PIECE HALL, HALIFAX

Ethel Cain

EXTRA DATE ADDED DUE TO PHENOMENAL DEMAND

WEDNESDAY 23 AUGUST 2023
THE PIECE HALL, HALIFAX

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A woman with long brown hair and dark eye makeup stands in the center of the frame, wearing a black blazer. She is positioned in front of a carousel with ornate, painted panels. To her left is a large, detailed mural of a religious figure, possibly the Virgin Mary, holding a child, surrounded by flowers. The background is filled with the warm, golden lights of the carousel and its intricate wooden structure. The text "three women partying" is overlaid in white, lowercase letters at the bottom center.

three women
partying



AS boygenius, LUCY DACUS, JULIEN BAKER
AND PHOEBE BRIDGERS HAVE FOUND A WAY
TO SPEND ALL OF THEIR TIME TOGETHER AND
MAKE AN ALBUM OF DEADPAN HUMOUR
AND QUIET DEVASTATION. IN NEW YORK CITY,
GEMMA SAMWAYS TALKS TO THEM ABOUT THE
GROWING HYSTERIA AROUND THE BAND,
THE IMPORTANCE OF TALKING SHIT ABOUT
YOUR FRIENDS, AND THE MUTUAL
ENCOURAGEMENT THAT'S GIVEN US the record.
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CIELITO M. VIVAS

from Bartók to Billie Holiday, Tchaikovsky to the Beatles, Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium has played host to some of the most illustrious names in music. Located in Midtown Manhattan, the theatre's interior resembles a luxury wedding cake: a vast expanse of pristine cream embellished with neo-renaissance cornicing, lightly dusted in gold. On the ceiling, a spectacular double halo of lights illuminates the sea of crimson velvet below, with four tiers of balcony seating and stalls stretching out before the famous Perelman Stage.

Tonight, the room is playing host to the 36th annual Tibet House US Benefit. Curated by Philip Glass – and featuring Laurie Anderson, Arooj Aftab and Bernard Sumner and Tom Chapman of New Order – the line-up reads like a particularly A-list episode of *Later... with Jools Holland*. It soon transpires its staging is similarly chaotic, with the event running approximately an hour behind schedule and artists often walking onstage unannounced.

boygenius are one of the few acts to enjoy a proper introduction. Added to the bill just 24 hours ago, their first public appearance in almost half a decade has prompted a frenzied, last minute scramble for seats, with \$35 tickets exchanging hands for ten times that amount. A day later, in a photo studio in the

East Village following our shoot at Jane's Carousel in Brooklyn, the trio admit to having felt a little freaked out in the build-up.

"I was really emotional because I've been obsessed with Nina Simone's Carnegie Hall album of late," Lucy Dacus confides, sat on the sofa, sandwiched between her bandmates. Julien Baker nods, confessing to having been "so stressed about doing my job that I couldn't fully absorb that I was playing alongside living legends." Meanwhile, Phoebe Bridgers was still semi-delirious with jetlag, having recently landed back in the US from Japan.

"Look at this photo," she laughs, extending her phone to me. Taken pre-gig, it shows her passed out on the dressing room floor while Lucy smirks in the foreground. "With full make-up, I look like I'm in an open casket. And because Julien was playing piano, I was having Julien-fuelled dreams."

Certainly there were no visible signs of unease as they stepped out onstage to play stripped-back versions of 'Not Strong Enough' and 'Cool About It' – taken from their long-awaited debut album *The Record* – for the first time. And despite the all-star bill, the supergroup proved one of the night's biggest draws, eliciting excited whoops from an audience who had greeted every other



performer with respectfully restrained applause. Ultimately, once they started playing, they enjoyed the experience.

Less gratifying was the discovery that a group of particularly intrusive fans had tracked down their hotel after the show. “They were like, ‘Don’t worry, you’re safe,’” Lucy shudders. “And it’s like, ‘No, we aren’t: how’d you find out where we are? That’s stalking. Don’t do this.’”

Phoebe continues: “I mean, interactions with fans can be really sweet, especially when it’s a show like Carnegie Hall which might’ve been hard to get tickets to. But often there’s this weird thing where the rudest people bubble to the top, and the poor kid who just wants their record signed is too nice to ask. And so, while I’m trying to escape the *fucking full-grown man who just grabbed me*, I’m ignoring the sweet kid.”

— *Totally artless* —

It’s fair to say a certain level of hysteria has surrounded boygenius ever since their formation. Five years ago they were all ascendant stars of the alternative scene, with the Tennessee-born Baker and Richmond, Virginia-raised Dacus being the

most established, with two acclaimed albums each. By the end of 2018, the trio were being breathlessly billed by *Vogue* as “the *Infinity War* of female-led indie-rock outfits,” while their self-titled EP received widespread praise.

Objectively, it’s a collaboration that made – and still makes – total sense. Despite outgrowing their respective DIY scenes, they had each retained a fiercely independent outlook and an emotional authenticity, and that struck a chord with similarly principled, serotonin-starved audiences. Just as tantalisingly, interviews and social media interactions revealed that they didn’t take themselves especially seriously and seemed keen to distance themselves from the pedestal that fans were so intent on putting them on.

“It’s probably refreshing that we’re not character artists,” Lucy says when asked to summarise the appeal of boygenius. “Because ultimately we’re talking to you now how we usually talk to each other. Even when I’m doing my own [solo] stuff, I present a curated version of myself – like, I pick one aspect of my character per album to share. But with this band it’s totally artless.”

It’s not hyperbolic to suggest that *The Record* is one of the most anticipated albums of the year. To some degree that





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demand can be explained by Baker and Dacus expanding their fanbases further off the back of their 2021 solo records *Little Oblivions* and *Home Video*. But the real responsibility for the band's reach surely lies at the feet of Bridgers, whose second album was nothing short of a cultural phenomenon.

Unanimously agreed to be one of 2020's standout records, *Punisher* propelled the Pasadena-raised artist into music's A-list, resulting in four Grammy nominations, an offer to found her own label (Saddest Factory, home to MUNA) and invites to collaborate with household names like Paul McCartney, SZA, Lorde and The 1975. Just days after our interview Phoebe is named one of *Time's* 2023 Women of the Year, alongside Cate Blanchett and Megan Rapinoe. This coming May she will open for Taylor Swift in Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and New Jersey.

Despite the difference in their public profiles, the power dynamic in boygenius appears impressively balanced. A friendship first and foremost, they've signed the contract by acquiring matching tattoos of a tooth and of a cluster of goblets, the latter inspired by the tarot card the three of cups.

“That's based on the first tarot reading Julien ever got,” Lucy – the band's resident tarot expert – recalls fondly. “We were all together and that's the first card she pulled. Plus it's three women partying. Friendship is the highest form of love and that felt like a sweet entry into that world.”

Having been raised in the world of evangelical Christianity, Julien was initially resistant to the idea of Tarot. “When you started doing a reading, I got up and sat in the tour van by myself because I thought God was gonna steal my soul,” she explains, totally serious.

“Does God do that?!” Phoebe laughs, incredulous.

“Yes! In [the book of] Samuel! But then I was like, ‘Alright, I trust you guys. I guess you can guide me through this.’ That was a fear that you guys helped me dismantle. Because by watching you engage with it, I realised that this was a tool for self-interrogation, not for summoning the devil.”

Within the band, all decisions are made democratically and affectionate ribbings are a big part of their social currency.

“Roasting each other is an act of love,” Julien reasons, to the others’ approval. “If your friends aren’t talking shit about you, I don’t think they care about you.”

With Phoebe based in Los Angeles, Lucy in Philadelphia and Julien in Memphis, they largely stay in touch via group chat and FaceTime – a support network they all clearly cherish. “I can text cold something horrible that happened to me and not feel the pressure to look at my phone for hours,” says Phoebe. “But when I do I’ll see a bunch of validation.”

Julien concurs: “It’s neat that we can confide in each other. Because sometimes my sense of imposter syndrome makes me not want to talk about how excited I am about this with friends who don’t work in music. I’m talking to them like, ‘You gotta get on a plane super early and carry all this heavy equipment, so it’s not all fun.’ And having people understand it’s a job and that I’m dedicated to it is very important. But equally, with y’all I get to be like, ‘*Shit’s so fucking sick!*’ Like, in this band I get to be the type of excited and thankful that lacks decorum, especially when there are so many talented people in my life where our roles could have been switched in an alternate timeline.”

— *Can we be a band again?* —

The roots of boygenius were laid in 2016, when Julien and Lucy performed on the same bill in Washington, D.C., followed by Julien meeting Phoebe a month later. When a canny promoter booked all three to tour together in 2018, they decided to record a collaborative seven-inch, a creative experiment that proved so fruitful they emerged with their eponymous EP.

By all accounts, the story behind *The Record* is similarly stress-free. Phoebe kickstarted the creative process just a week after releasing *Punisher*, sending a demo of ‘Emily, I’m Sorry’ to Lucy and Julien with the words, “Can we be a band again?” From there, the floodgates opened, with all three uploading demos to a shared drive, followed by two in-person writing trips – one in Healdsburg, California in April 2021 and another in Malibu in August of the same year.

Though carefully scheduled due to their individual work commitments, Lucy describes these retreats as anything but regimented. “We didn’t intend to work that hard,” she insists. “If anything, the regimen would have included breaks and we didn’t allow ourselves those.” Julien expands, “We’d be like, ‘Okay, today is a chill day,’ but then we could not stop thinking about the record. And it’s just nice to be around a bunch of people who are passionate about the exact same thing.”

After whittling down the demos from a pool of 25, the final 12 were recorded at Rick Rubin’s Shangri-La studio in January 2022, with the help of co-producer Catherine Marks (Wolf Alice, Foals, PJ Harvey). Lucy specifically cites Marks’ work with Manchester Orchestra as a motivating factor for them initially reaching out, and Phoebe enthuses about her hands-on approach. “She’s the kind of producer that immediately kicks off their shoes. Wait, I’m gonna text her and tell her we’re talking about her.” She takes a group selfie of them all grinning, flicking Vs, and hits send.

Other key contributors included engineer and producer Sarah Tudzin (Slowdive, Weyes Blood), plus Jay Som’s Melina

Duterte on bass. Melina will also appear as part of boygenius’ seven-strong touring line-up, set to be unveiled at Coachella in April. Given that their band name specifically mocks society’s tendency to unfairly exalt male creatives, the idea of boygenius assembling a largely female team for this album feels satisfyingly utopian. Today, they insist it was purely circumstantial.

“They are the best people we could think of,” says Lucy. “Some days I’m like, ten-year-old me would feel that this is very important. But also there are days where I’m like, we’re doing press right now and it’s completely uninteresting that we’re women. Why are we talking about this?”

“Plus, it’s not a given that if you work with women you’re not also working with a bunch of assholes,” Phoebe grins. “Fortunately, we picked a bunch of people who aren’t assholes.” Lucy laughs. “Women can be assholes: there’s your pull quote.”

Sonically, *The Record* is a much richer, more ambitious collection than anything boygenius have produced previously, taking in widescreen folk-rock (‘Not Strong Enough’) and low-slung punk (‘Satanist’, ‘\$20’), campfire folk (‘Cool About It’, ‘Leonard Cohen’) and string-flecked dream-pop (‘Revolution 0’), plus a swooning a cappella piece shaped around a lush three-part harmony (‘Without You Without Them’).

Though written by Lucy, Phoebe can take full credit for unearthing the latter. “I was like, ‘I want a song that’s like ‘Blue Velvet.’ And Lucy’s like, ‘Oh... Actually I might have a song...’ And I’m like, ‘What the fuck are you talking about?!’”

“It was a washing the dishes song,” Lucy protests, smiling. “There’s, like, this whole category of songs that I don’t show people. And I didn’t think of that as a ‘me’ song because it doesn’t sound like what I do, you know? But Phoebe was like, ‘We have to do it.’ Plus, I like that it kind of picks up where we left off with ‘Ketchum, ID’ [from their 2018 EP]. So I’m glad you made us do that.”

This process of mutual encouragement is integral to the band. They’re the first to admit they’re one another’s fiercest supporters, to the extent they accidentally plagiarise each other on a regular basis. “I totally wrote ‘Garden Song’ the other day,” Julien tells Phoebe, who cheerfully bats back. “‘Revolution 0’ is basically me ripping off ‘Good News.’”

Jokes aside, all three songwriters boast instantly recognisable styles, as demonstrated by the triumvirate of singles with which they announced *The Record*. ‘Emily, I’m Sorry’ is quintessential Phoebe Bridgers, a slice of folky introspection that wouldn’t sound out of place on *Punisher*, while ‘True Blue’ showcases the quietly anthemic indie-rock that Lucy has made her calling card. Meanwhile, the buoyant ‘\$20’ sees former hardcore kid Julien leaning into her love of riffing.

With most structures initially emanating from one particular songwriter, it does beg the question, what makes a track right for the band rather than remaining a solo endeavour? According to Phoebe, she relies on a type of benign Spidey-Sense. “I always know when I’m writing a boygenius song. Even with ‘Me And My Dog’ I was like, ‘I don’t think this is a solo record song.’”



“

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Lucy is more specific. “A lot of times I'll write a song for us in a different frame of mind, so you can be harmonising with me and saying something that's still true for you. I don't want to make either of you sing lyrics that don't resonate with you.”

“I really struggle with that,” Phoebe says. “So much of my music is directly my point of view and so specific.”

“Totally,” Lucy nods, “I feel like on a lot of your songs we're supporting...”

“...like a chorus in a Greek play,” replies Julien, finishing Lucy's thought. “We're not a part of the action: we're standing behind, commenting on or observing it. But these songs only exist because we made *The Record*. They're an article of the endeavour rather than a pre-planned thing.”

Lucy takes the final word on the subject. “These aren't solo songs that we donated to each other: we had to be together to make it.”

Lyricaly, *The Record* treads a tightrope between deadpan humour and quiet devastation. The opening line of ‘We're In Love’ sees Lucy resolutely opting for the latter, singing, “*You could absolutely break my heart / That's how I know that we're in love.*” ‘Leonard Cohen’ falls firmly into the former camp, delivering a frontrunner for lyric of the year in: “*Leonard Cohen once said there's a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in / And I am not an old man having an existential crisis / In a Buddhist monastery / Writing horny poetry / But I agree.*”

“I think my songs have a theme of being known and feeling present,” Lucy reflects. “Because I don't feel that at all points in my life, I'm expressing my gratitude for that.” Phoebe sees her contributions as aspirational; evidence of the very process of self-improvement. “Each of the songs I contributed have a vibe of me trying my absolute hardest to not float ten inches above my body at all times. And you guys have helped me with that, so it makes sense that it would make the album.”

‘Not Strong Enough’ is perhaps their most collaborative song: a patchwork of ideas in which each band member takes a verse, as Julien jokes, “boyband-style”. Musically, it's also the

album's most uplifting moment, its bright melody providing a smokescreen for lyrics exploring panic attacks and low self-esteem. When I point out the deception, Phoebe laughs. “You know the meme of the pink house and the black house next to each other, where it's like one is the music and the other is the lyrics? That's literally a couple miles from where we recorded our album. We've been talking about taking a photo in front of it for years.”

— *Share your darlings* —

After an hour in their company, it's not difficult to see why boygenius are inspiring such levels of adoration. A tight-knit gang of smart, talented, young songwriters, they're the sort of band I wish had existed when I was growing up, even if I am battling to resist the urge to cast them as role models. After all, why should the men of rock be lauded for chaos while women have to be figures of unimpeachable virtue? When I mention the double standard, Lucy rolls her eyes.

“I remember when Phoebe did that *Playboy* article [in 2020]. People were texting me like, ‘I thought she was a role model for young girls?’ And I was like, 1. You can pose in *Playboy* and be a role model, and 2. When exactly did she sign up for that?”

“It is tight to me that you got texts and I did not,” Phoebe smiles. “I *want* to be scary. Like, as women or as queer people, we're taught that anger is not useful and that forgiveness is the highest form of enlightenment. But I don't think so. I think that I've spent a lot of my life trying to make everybody in a room feel ok when I don't feel ok. It's great to have boundaries. And as a band we're all really good at protecting each other.”

Staying loyal to their DIY roots, boygenius are ultimately motivated by creating a community and enjoying the process of a shared endeavour. “Writing songs for this band is the opposite of saving your darlings for yourself,” Julien explains. “I want to bring the best possible offering to the band because it's my favourite thing. It feels *good* to give the songs away.”

“Seriously, we have been looking forward to this time together for *years*,” says Phoebe. “This is the time we finally get to be around each other so we're gonna enjoy it.”



STYLIST: LINDSEY HARTMAN. STYLIST ASSISTANTS: SUSAN WALSH, HANNAH NIXON, AMBER SIMIRIGLIA, SERGIO MEJIA. MAKEUP: GIANPAOLO CECILIATO. MAKEUP ASSISTANT: VADEE CHUN. HAIR: JOSUE PEREZ. HAIR ASSISTANT: BEN MARTIN.